AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following listing of claims replaces all prior listings of claims.

1.   (Currently Amended) A method for providing automated call acknowledgement services over a communications network, comprising:

receiving a data request from a call-receiving device to acknowledge an incoming call from a calling device, ~~said data request including:~~

~~a phone number for said call-receiving device;~~

~~at least one of a phone number and text address for said calling device;~~

~~a message type; and~~

~~a voice/text indicator selection;~~

retrieving a pre-defined acknowledgement message from a database ~~based upon said message type;~~ and

sending said pre-defined acknowledgement message to said calling device;

wherein said sending an acknowledgement message to said calling device is implemented in lieu of answering said incoming call.

2.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said sending an acknowledgement message includes transmitting said pre-defined acknowledgement message in text form.

3.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said sending an acknowledgement message includes transmitting said pre-defined acknowledgement message in voice form.

4.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said pre-defined acknowledgement message is created by a user of said automated call acknowledgement services.

5.   (Original) The method of claim 3, further comprising creating a call request, said call request including:

a phone number for a calling party;

a phone number for said call-receiving device; and

said pre-defined acknowledgement message converted into voice format.

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6.   (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

storing a phone number for a calling party device;

storing a text address of said calling party device; and

mapping said phone number for said calling party device to said text address of said calling party device operable for selecting a mode of transmission for said pre-defined acknowledgement message.

7.   (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

storing a message type;

storing a pre-defined acknowledgement message; and

mapping said message type to said pre-defined acknowledgement message operable for linking pre-defined acknowledgement messages to message types displayed on said call-receiving device and retrieving associated pre-defined acknowledgement messages from storage for transmission to said calling device.

8.   (Currently Amended) A system for providing automated call acknowledgement services over a communications network, comprising:

a call-receiving device receiving a call from a calling device;

an automated call acknowledgement service executing on a server, said automated call acknowledgement service in communication with said call-receiving device and said calling device;

a data request ~~comprising:~~

~~a phone number for said call-receiving device;~~

~~at least one of a phone number and text address for said calling device;~~

~~a message type; and~~

~~a voice/text indicator selection~~; and

a pre-defined acknowledgement message generated by said automated call acknowledgement service;

wherein said pre-defined acknowledgement message is sent to said calling device in lieu of answering said incoming call.

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9.   (Original) The system of claim 8, further comprising:

a calling customer profile database in communication with said automated call acknowledgement service, said calling customer profile database storing:

text addresses for calling parties; and

phone numbers for calling parties, said phone numbers mapped to corresponding text addresses.

10.   (Original) The system of claim 8, further comprising:

a called customer profile database in communication with said automated call acknowledgement service, said called customer profile database storing:

personal data of call-receiving parties associated with said call-receiving devices, said personal data including phone numbers of said call-receiving parties; and

pre-defined acknowledgement messages associated with message type options, said pre-defined acknowledgement messages mapped to corresponding message type options.

11.   (Original) The system of claim 8, wherein said voice/text indicator selection includes an option operable for sending an acknowledgement message in at least one of a voice format and a text format, said voice/text indicator selection being selectable by a user on said call-receiving device.

12.   (Original) The system of claim 8, further comprising a call request operable for initiating a text-to-voice conversion of a pre-defined acknowledgement message.

13.   (Original) The system of claim 12, wherein said call request includes a delay field operable for preventing premature placing of a call to an originator of said incoming call.

14.   (Currently Amended)   A storage medium encoded with machine-readable computer program code for providing automated call acknowledgement services over a communications network, said storage medium including instructions for causing a computer to implement a method, comprising:

receiving a data request from a call-receiving device to acknowledge an incoming call from a calling device, ~~said data request including:~~

~~a phone number for said call-receiving device;~~

~~at least one of a phone number and text address for said calling device;~~

~~a message type; and~~

~~a voice/text indicator selection;~~

retrieving a pre-defined acknowledgement message from a database ~~based upon said message type~~; and

sending said pre-defined acknowledgement message to said calling device;

wherein said sending an acknowledgement message to said calling device is implemented in lieu of answering said incoming call.

15.   (Original)   The storage medium of claim 14, wherein said sending an acknowledgement message includes transmitting said pre-defined acknowledgement message in text form.

16.   (Original)   The storage medium of claim 14, wherein said sending an acknowledgement message includes transmitting said pre-defined acknowledgement message in voice form.

17.   (Original)   The storage medium of claim 14, wherein said pre-defined acknowledgement message is created by a user of said automated call acknowledgement services.

18.   (Original) The storage medium of claim 16, further comprising instructions for causing said computer to create a call request, said call request including:

a phone number for a calling party;

a phone number for said call-receiving device; and

said pre-defined acknowledgement message converted into voice format.

19.   (Original) The storage medium of claim 14, further comprising instructions for causing said computer to implement:

storing a phone number for a calling party device;

storing a text address of said calling party device; and

mapping said phone number for said calling party device to said text address of said calling party device operable for selecting a mode of transmission for said pre-defined acknowledgement message.

20.   (Original) The storage medium of claim 14, further comprising instructions for causing said computer to implement:

storing a message type;

storing a pre-defined acknowledgement message; and

mapping said message type to said pre-defined acknowledgement message operable for linking pre-defined acknowledgement messages to message types displayed on said call-receiving device and retrieving associated pre-defined acknowledgement messages from storage for transmission to said calling device.

21. (New) The method of claim 1, wherein said data request includes:

a phone number for said call-receiving device;

at least one of a phone number and text address for said calling device;

a message type; and

a voice/text indicator selection.

22. (New) The system of claim 8, wherein said data request includes:

a phone number for said call-receiving device;

at least one of a phone number and text address for said calling device;

a message type; and

a voice/text indicator selection.

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23. (New) The storage medium of claim 14, wherein said data request includes:

a phone number for said call-receiving device;

at least one of a phone number and text address for said calling device;

a message type; and

a voice/text indicator selection.